

My dad, Stephen Alan Oxtan died in "The Lakes" on the 1st April 2012 when he barricaded himself in his room and hung himself.

My dad was born on 1st November 1958 at St Heliers Hospital in Sutton. He emigrated to Australia in 1961 travelling on the S.S Strathaird. He moved around Australia near to Brisbane and Adelaide and as a young child he brought up an orphaned baby kangaroo which he called Joey.

My dad moved back to London in 1971 and wanting to support a local football team he decided to support Arsenal who were in the FA cup final at the time.

In 1974 my dad met my mum Julie who he later married and in 1987 and they moved to Colchester.

My dad followed his dad's footsteps by becoming a removal man. He worked for various companies such as Pickfords and Bishops Move and would regularly travel overseas for weeks at a time. I enjoyed school holidays where I could go away with him.

When he was home he would take me to watch Arsenal, getting into the ground early and staying late to try and get players autographs as they were warming up or leaving the stadium. He would also watch me play football and liked collecting Arsenal programmes as well as model removal lorries. One of my favourite memories was taking him to a stadium tour for Christmas hosted by his favourite player Charlie George who scored the winning goal in the FA cup final in 1971, spurring his passion for Arsenal.

In January 1998 a few weeks after spending Christmas with us, my grandad was stabbed to death in London following a disagreement in a pub. The landlord of the pub referred to my grandad as "the gentle giant" in the media, a trait my dad also shared. I remember on one occasion a friend of my grandmother was struggling financially and my dad decided to buy two weeks' worth of groceries for her to ensure she wasn't without.

At the time of my grandad's murder, my dad was in Germany for work and had to be flown back to the UK. The death of his dad had a massive effect on my own dad and the dad I knew and loved was gone. He suffered with PTSD and depression and was seen by the trust for treatment from 2000 to 2009. His mental health was the primary reason why my parents separated and divorced in 2007, resulting in myself being the primary carer for my dad until his death.

My dad spent a significant proportion of time trying to keep his dad's killer in prison. One morning we woke up to the news that he had suffered a heart attack in prison. I thought this might allow my dad to move on and as a result I might get a proportion of my dad back. However, his mental health deteriorated further, and he tried to obtain treatment twice from the trust in 2010 and 2011 but these cries for help were

both refused. It took my dad to attempt to take his own life in 2011 before the trust readmitted him for treatment. My dad then tried to take his own life on two further occasions in 2011 and 2012.

On the morning of the 31st March 2012, while I was sleeping following a nightshift, I received a voicemail from my dad of him screaming for help, saying he wanted to kill himself. He was taken by Police to Shannon House after he tried to take his own life on the railway tracks. He was subsequently transferred to The Lakes. I lived in the Manchester at the time and was intending to travel to Essex to ensure my dad received the adequate care he deserved. I recall being told by staff at The Lakes that he was in a place of safety. Due to this reassurance and having travelled at short notice on previous incidents, I decided to stay and work my last nightshift before travelling down the following day.

The next morning, I was getting a few hours sleep before travelling to Essex, I received a call from my dad's girlfriend telling me that he has tried to take his own life in The Lakes and that he has been rushed to A&E. I realised my conversation with the staff in The Lakes where they reassured me that he was in a place of safety was a false reassurance. I felt utterly betrayed and devastated by the realisation.

During the internal investigation, it became apparent that at least one staff member at Shannon House had lied, with staff members providing conflicting reports regarding how it came to be that my dad had access to his belt which he used to hang himself. There were other concerns and issues raised by the panel conducting the investigation. I understand that the Inquiry will consider this evidence later in its investigations, but I want to describe the effect that not knowing the full truth has had on my mental health. The truth surrounding the details of my dad's death is something I feel I need to be able to achieve some kind of closure.

I obtained a copy of the report from the panel who conducted the internal investigation at the time of my dad's death. The investigation provided more questions than answers and identified multiple failings in his care. I failed to understand why they did not seek the truth at the time of the investigation, with a sense it was to protect the trust from scrutiny and adversity. This has resulted in myself having little faith and trust when under care for my own mental health.

The day after my dad took his life, my dad's girlfriend questioned staff at The Lakes about why he had been left unsupervised with opportunities to ligature. She was told by staff that he would have killed himself in another way if not in this particular way. I was horrified when she told me about this callous excuse for the staff's failures. I felt as if they did not care whether my dad lived or died.

There was an inquest which returned a narrative verdict which stated there were multiple failings by the state to protect my dad which contributed to his death. I understand that the detail of these will be considered later by the Inquiry, but I want to say at this point about the hollow feeling I felt when I saw everything confirmed in

writing by the Coroner. Three failings were mentioned and each felt like a body blow to me.

The death of my dad has left a catastrophic effect on my own life, with each one the four suicide attempts having a profound impact on my own mental health, worsening each time before his eventual suicide on the fourth attempt.

This has resulted in myself having suicidal thoughts and still taking antidepressants which I started taking two months after his death. I have been prescribed four different antidepressants over the years. Each anti-depressant has gradually increased to the maximum dosage until I found no benefit.

I have had multiple courses of treatment for depression with the prime focus being my dad's death and having suicidal thoughts myself.

I have been treated as an outpatient by the Trust for mental health in 2013, then by another mental health service in 2017 and 2018.

In 2019, I sought private treatment where I was diagnosed with a recurrent depressive disorder.

The most recent recurrence of depression started in April 2023, resulting in further treatment from the Trust which ended in August 2024.

In addition to the medication and mental health treatment above, between 2012 and 2017 I regularly attended a support group called Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide on a monthly basis.

At the time of my dad's death, I was living in Manchester with my girlfriend. The subsequent deterioration of my own mental health caused this relationship to end eight months after my dad's death. I have since struggled to open up in relationships and instead have been very withdrawn, resulting in difficulties with girlfriends, family and friends.

I have been through two Essex police investigations (directly after his death and corporate manslaughter with other families), private litigation against the trust and the HSE investigation. After all of these investigations and legal proceedings I am still none the wiser what actually happened on the days in question and call for this inquiry to please establish the facts for myself and the other families who have suffered and to stop any more preventable deaths in the trust's facilities.

At the end of each investigation, I say to family and friends that is the last time I will be a participant in an investigation due to the negative impact on my own mental health as I have to relive it again. However, as each investigation has never identified and established the truth around my dad's death while an inpatient, I have always returned to join the next investigation. I hope this inquiry will establish the truth in regard to my dad's death and all the other families who have lost loved ones, so they do not have to go through the trauma of another investigation to seek the truth.